5-21-1918

Lufbery in Toul Sector

LUFBERY IN TOUL SECTOR

American Ace Hazed as He Arrives at the Great Aerodrome

SENT AFTER UHLANS WITH EMPTY GUN

Flier Glad to Escape From Drudgery of Air Machine Shop

Raoul Lufbery, the brilliant American Ace of Aces, whose aviation career was tragically but gloriously ended on May 19, when he fought his "last battle," had begun to write a story of his life in the air some months ago, thus enlightening the world as to how he "broke into the game," under the French flag.

In 1914, when rumors of a break with Germany were filling the air, Lufbery enlisted in an American "club," which in reality was a recruiting agency conducted in Paris by Americans who were banding together to die for France, if necessary.

From the infantry, Lufbery quickly worked his way into the Permanence de L'Aeronautique, from which he was sent to an aviation machine shop. In today's instalment—the fourth—Lufbery tells of his departure for the Toul sector.

By RAOUL LUFBERY.

A week passed at the centre of aviation at Dijon without my having to exert any talents as a sailmaker. The Battle of the Marne was at hand, but our placid existence was undisturbed. The greater portion of my working time was spent as "pilote des caises d'essence," an aviation term applied to unloading the auto trucks bringing in the sixty liter cases of aeroplane gasoline and carrying them to the storeroom on one's back.

This was not a very interesting occupation, but it had to be done. Moreover, it was useless to object, the military regulations requiring that one perform the duties assigned to him, without any dispute. To those who complain they invariably reply with a shrug of the shoulders and a "Qu'est-se que vous voulez? C'est la guerre!"

My only consolation was in finding there a friend whom I had known before the war, Captain James N. Hall, who was with me the other day when he was shot down and captured. He was an author and had won the academic palms. He, also, struggled at "pilotage des caisses d'essence," but lacked the inclination and the training for this kind of work, and I do not think that I made a mistake when I said that he would never be an expert in that line.

After the day's work was finished, we invariably spent the evening in the barracks, reading the papers and discussing the news, which at that time was very discouraging.

DISCUSSING THE NEWS.

"It's going bad. It's going very bad," said one. "The Boches continue their march toward Paris! It appears that they're not very far from there now."

To which another replied: "But, old top, don't you see, that's the idea. We let them advance in order to beat them all the worse. Besides, I've got the latest dope, my cousin works in the ministry."

Then the shrill rasping voice of our pessimist broke out. "You're all of you way behind the times. Don't let any one pull the wool over your eyes like that. Can't you see that we've been betrayed; sold out to the Boche as we were in 1870! What do you think of it? You, the American!"

"What do I think of it?" I replied reflectively. "Well, I think that although we have lost the first battle, we still have enough time to win another."

This reply, almost heroique, did not please my interlocutor the least bit, for he shouted in a voice louder than before, "Hey, there! You guys; look at the Yank who's trying to put something over on us. That's all been hashed over long ago. General Desaix made that same little claptrap speech years before you, and he at least was an ace of his time, while you—why! You'll never be one, or I miss my guess."

I was going to answer, when suddenly "Taps" were sounded, putting an end to the discussion, and we all went to bed.

The centre of aviation at Dijon, like all large centres which were up to date, had its cemetery; except

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that this one did not exist, as one might be led to believe, to serve as the last resting place for the remains of the pilotes and mechanicians of the camp. No, indeed! It was simply a chosen patch of ground, or rather, a very bizarre dumpheap, where rested in common the remains of aeroplanes of all types and all makes.

AN AEROPLANE GRAVEYARD.

This graveyard made a lasting impression upon my memory. Often, during a few leisure moments, I would stroll over there and rest my elbows upon the top rail of the fence that separated these derelicts from the outer world. I would think how much like human beings were these discarded machines.

Only a few months ago they had been alive, although it was only a mechanical life, and had been able to defy the laws of gravity and soar with the birds. And now—they were in the discard, left to rot and ruin, not worth the space they occupied.

The flat surfaces of the wings were covered with dust; the fabric had been torn in thousands of places and here and there pieces dangled by mere threads, swaying in the breeze; the cables and staywires especially appealed to the spiders looking for a home, and in many cases were veritable panels of cobwebs, and occasionally there was to be seen a motor, rusty enough to have been at the bottom of the ocean for a dozen years.

In looking over this ghostly and motley collection of derelicts I had much the same feeling that I imagined the good people who first saw old Rip Van Winkle must have had when he burst upon them after his twenty years of sleep.

I could distinguish many of the different types, while others were smashed and wrecked beyond all recognition. Just before me lay a Blériot that had been through a bad wing slip. The right wing was broken off close at the fuselage and its tip crumpled and torn, much as one wads up a newspaper before throwing it into the fire.

LIKE THRESHING MACHINE.

In one corner I could make out an old Breguet that had experienced a "pancake," or loss of speed, from a height of about thirty feet. Its landing gear had been pushed away up between the wings. Among us mechanicians this type of machine was familiarly called "McCormick" because when in the air the sound of its motor could be very easily mistaken for the threshing machine at work in the adjoinng field.

Near the entrance lay an ancient Farman, type 1913, with the elevating planes sticking away out in front. In loving terms we always spoke of this type apparatus as a "cage poule" because, with its many struts and interlaced staywires, it did greatly resemble the fenced-in yard where the better portion of our ham and eggs originate. Also this pet name, at times, rather got under the skin of the pilotes riding these buses.

Occupying a prominent place in the centre of this sacred plot, drooped one over another, were several Morane-Parasols. One in particular I recognized. Its nose was smashed in, its tail gone, and the fuselage broken off square, just back of the pilot's seat. Only a few days previous the pilot had lost control of this machine and rammed into the ground head first; one of the worst smashes I have even seen. It made me shiver to look at it.

Frequently my reveries were disturbed by the arrival of a new victim. Then I would jump over the fence, examine it carefully, trying to ascertain, if possible, the cause of its downfall, and later discussing the accident with my comrades.

The day following my dispute with the pessimist I was assigned with my friend, the academician, to carry the tail of a smashed Bleriot to its last abode. A corporal was in command of the detail; that is to say, he was the "master of ceremonies."

"Hey, corporal! Director of the cortege," cried my friend, "don't you think that a little march from Chopin would be appropriate on this occasion?"

STARTS FOR THE FRONT.

The corporal, good boy that he was, found the idea very amusing and set the example himself by striking up the opening strains in his deep bass voice.

Being unable to sing, or at the most singing very badly, I contented myself by being the chief mourner. But this did not add to the harmony. My wailings resembled more the yelping of a dog when you step on his tail.

The funeral procession was slowly approaching the cemetery, when suddenly a loud voice rose above our hubbub. I heard someone calling, "Lufbery! Lufbery!" I turned around and saw a figure coming towards us gesturing wildly. Looking again, I recognized Marc Pourpe.

"Well! Luf, old man! How's everything going?" he said, shaking hands. "You certainly have been interested in your work; here I've been hollering at you for more than five minutes, and you never even turned your head."

"Qu'est-ve que vous voulez?" I replied, shrugging my shoulders. "C'est la guerre!"

"C'est la guerre! Yes!" he shot back. "And now you're going to fight in a slightly different fashion, for I'm taking you to the front with me! We leave tomorrow, in my double-seater Morane-Parasol, to join the Escadrille M. S. at Toul. I have seen the commanding officer of the camp, asked for you, and everything is arranged. Nothing more for you to do but to pack. Does that suit you?"

"Hip! Hip! Hip! Hooray!" I rousingly replied.

The next day I was ready long before the hour of departure. Very carefully I had packed my equipment in all the spare corners of the fuselage. There was a blanket, a haversack, very fat and bulging, holding my mess kit, toilet articles, etc.; a bag of tools, and lastly a "fusil Gras," a relic of the days of 1870, with which I proposed to bring down the first Boche who would be unfortunate enough to cross our path.

The visibility was good, the clouds were high, and the wind favorable. "We must take advantage of these excellent conditions," remarked Marc Pourpe upon approaching his machine, "and get under way. Bundle up well, because it's a long trip, and you know how cold it is up high. You haven't forgotten the least little thing?"

Then, glancing toward the rear seat, he saw my baggage.

LANDS NEAR TOUL.

"Well! Well!" he exclaimed, "you certainly have a nerve. What's all this junk? A fusil Gras! Why not a 'soixante quinze?' But no; this time I object. Do you take my Morane for a wheelbarrow? If we're able to leave the ground with all this junk, well, we'll certainly be fortunate, and our lucky star, which has always favored us, will still be here, watching over us, keeping us in the right path, safe from all harm." And more of the same.

Nevertheless, a little later, the Morane-Parasol, in spite of its overload, driven by its pilot, defended by its mechanician, majestically took the air and headed northwest, leaving far behind a checkerboard of forests, towns and green fields, interlaced here and there by the smooth, hard-packed roads, standing out in the sunset like silvery ribbons.

That evening towards 5 o'clock, after an uneventful voyage, we landed on the aviation field near Toul. There we found a few friends whom we had known before the war; among them the aviators Gilbert and Garros, who also belonged to this famous "Escadrille de reconnaisance M. S. 23," commanded by Captain de Vergnette.

Being as yet unaccustomed to long aerial trips, I admitted frankly that I was rather tired, and I was more than pleased to find, in the mechanics' dormitory, an unoccupied bed with several blankets. Arranging things as comfortably as possible, I was preparing to enjoy a well-earned rest, when suddenly in the next room, separated from ours by only a wooden partition, I heard some voices and soon recognized that of Garros.

"My captain," he said, "I declare openly that it's getting to be terrible. Again, I was almost brought down by French bullets! And this time it wasn't too far away. It hit my rear gasoline tank and just grazed the observer's back. Don't you think that this is ridiculous? It would be much preferable if they did not shoot at all. This time, there was absolutely no excuse; I was flying low enough for them to see my cocardes, if they took the trouble."

VOLUNTEERS TO MEET FOE.

"Yes," responded the captain, "this is happening too frequently. We must look for a remedy. But it is not altogether the poilus' fault that they shoot at us, they mean all right. I think that, above all, the newspapers are responsible for these disagreeable mistakes. Look here! Not later than last Monday, I read an article which said that all aeroplanes having a covered fuselage and a fish-like tail were German. You will admit that this is stupid, although nothing is truer. But one thing is evident—that the reporters who write this foolishness have always ignored, and still ignore, the existence of the Morane-Parasol."

"Mechanicians, attention! I demand absolute silence! I have a very important message for you!" It was the Adjutant Pilote Pinsard who burst into our room and spoke thusly:

"Wait for these orders, and above all, let no one move unless I say so," he continued in gasps, due no doubt to his rather violent entrance. By the flickering light of the lantern he read the following message, apparently received by telephone:

"To the Commanding Officer of the Escadrille M. S. 23:

"It has been reported that forty Uhlans are advancing towards Toul, probably with the intention of making a raid upon the aerodrome. Prepare for the defence of the camp as rapidly as possible."

After having read the message, the adjutant quickly lifted his head, looked around and inquired: "Are there some brave ones among you? I must have four volunteers immediately!"

As rapidly as possible I slipped into my clothes, put on my shoes, and without losing a minute, offered my services to the pilote Pinsard.

"Excellent! That's very good," he said. "See that gun over there in the corner? Take it and come with me. I am going to post you as advance sentry."

"You will wait here," he said, addressing the three other mechanics. "I'll come back for you. Put out all lights and, above all, make no noise."

We went out into the night together, stealthily slipping along, grazing the walls, and taking a thousand precautions to avoid being seen. Finally we arrived near a large tree which was to serve as the strategic position. Already somebody was there. That somebody proved to be Marc Pourpe, a revolver in his right hand and a dagger in his left. His eyes were trying to pierce the darkness in the direction from which the enemy should appear. Upon seeing us he let out a sigh of relief.

"At last," he whispered hoarsely, "the relief. It's not too soon. Certainly it is more than half an hour that I've been on the alert."

"The relief! Not yet!" answered Pinsard. "This is only reinforcements that I have brought you.

"You understand, Lufbery," he added, turning towards me, "you are to remain here until your ammunition is exhausted. See that hay stack near the road?"

"Yes, I see it," I replied.

"Well! When the enemy arrives there commence firing."

"But," I protested to him, "I have examined the magazine of my Lebel and there's not a single cartridge in it."

"That makes no difference," he assured me, "remain here just the same. I will send some." And he was gone.

Five minutes passed, then ten, and the ammunition did not show up. In reality I was beginning to find the time a trifle long.

"All the same this is too much negligence. Don't you think so?" asked Pourpe.

"So much the worse," I replied, putting on a resigned air. "A la guerre, comme a la guerre! If the Uhlans come, I'll hit 'em on the head with the butt of my gun."

"You'd better go back and get some cartridges," advised Pourpe in a subdued voice. "What can you do, with an empty gun against forty? Go! I'll remain here alone."

I hastened over to the dormitory, and, throwing open the door, cried as loud as possible, "CARTRIDGES! For the——" But I could not finish. Loud peals of laughter came from all corners of the room. The joke was so evident that I could not help from joining in the general hilarity.

"Don't say a word to anyone," confided a mechanic near me, "that's how we initiate all the new arrivals. Now we're going to play it on another."

THE END.